

Our National Discipline :

A

THANKSGIVING SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

TROY, N. Y., NOV. 26, 1863.

BY

REV. MARVIN R. VINCENT,

PASTOR.



TROY, N. Y.:

A. W. SCRIBNER, PRINTER, CANNON PLACE.
1863.



Our National Discipline :

A

THANKSGIVING SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

TROY, N. Y., NOV. 26, 1863.

BY

REV. MARVIN R. VINCENT,

PASTOR.



TROY, N. Y. :

A. W. SCRIBNER, PRINTER, CANNON PLACE.
1863.

TROY, November 27, 1863.

REV. M. R. VINCENT,

Dear Sir :

The undersigned, members of your congregation, having listened with pleasure to the discourse delivered by you, on the 26th inst., and approving of the sentiments therein contained, request you to consent to its publication, and to furnish a copy for that purpose at your earliest convenience. The views so distinctly expressed on the great issues of the day, we think, are calculated to do good, and the cause of Religion and Liberty demands its circulation.

Respectfully yours,

N. S. S. BEMAN,	R. D. STARKWEATHER,
S. K. STOW,	GEO. EVANS,
GILES B. KELLOGG,	E. J. HICKS,
DAVID COWEE,	S. B. SAXTON,
F. S. THAYER,	JONATHAN EDWARDS,
J. W. FREEMAN,	CHARLES A. HOLMES,
JAMES H. HOWE,	HARVEY J. KING,
CHARLES P. HARTT,	N. DAVENPORT,
MARTIN I. TOWNSEND,	J. P. ALBERTSON,
A. H. GRAVES,	WM. F. SAGE,
J. SHERRY,	E. S. FULLER.

TROY, November 30th, 1863.

REV. N. S. S. BEMAN, D. D., S. K. STOW, DAVID COWEE and others :

Dear Brethren :—Your request for a copy of my Thanksgiving Discourse for publication is gratifying to me as an endorsement of the views therein presented. Fully convinced as I am of their important bearing upon the issues of the present, I shall rejoice with you, if their circulation shall contribute, in however small a degree, to the diffusion of correct Christian sentiment respecting the interests of our beloved land. I cheerfully comply, therefore, with your request, and forward you the manuscript herewith.

Affectionately yours,

MARVIN R. VINCENT.

SERMON.



JOB XXVI: 22. "WHO TEACHETH LIKE HIM?"

Above every other man, the Christian minister is to "stand in the ways and see." While he is to be exempt from the dictation of public opinion as to the manner in which he shall deal with evil, he is to find his most telling texts and sermons in contemporary men and events. Religion, if it have no relation to such subjects, may be useful for angels, but not for men.

The consideration of this fact cannot be omitted from our thoughts, on an occasion like this. Our Thanksgiving will be deep and heartfelt in proportion as it is understanding. A child, when informed that he is heir to a fortune, will be delighted because of the beautiful objects and the comforts which he sees it purchase for him. His gratitude is superficial. It will not be tempered with serious feelings by reason of the responsibilities which come with wealth. His mind cannot grasp the large benefits which will accrue to him;

the means of mental training, social position, extended culture, large beneficence. And if we shall sit down this day with our minds dwelling only on the more palpable and obvious motives for thanksgiving — our financial prosperity, our well filled barns, our freedom from disease, our extended business — this festival day will leave upon our minds and hearts no deeper impression than is left by any day in which we shake off the fetters of business, spread our tables abundantly, and make merry with our kindred and neighbors. Each merely palpable blessing is a gold rock, peering above the surface, valuable in itself, but chiefly valuable as it points to the mine beneath. Especially is this the case when the palpable grounds of thanksgiving are comparatively few in number; when, to a superficial, and particularly to a faithless observer, it would seem as though there were cause for mourning rather than for thanksgiving; and when men are found ignorant, as well as blasphemous enough to say, like the arch traitor of New York on a similar occasion, they see no cause for thanksgiving. All men will share this error more or less, according as they accustom themselves to look merely at the outward manifestations of Providence. Only as we shall make our thanksgiving unselfish, only as we shall consent to be lifted to a plane whence we

may behold God's great system fulfilling its appointed round, to see our joys and afflictions, not only as sources of pleasure or pain to us, but as the results of forces which must touch us in their revolution, and which have a mission far outside the sphere of our personal feelings;—only as we shall have faith enough to see God working in shadow, and zeal enough to study laws rather than results, shall we celebrate a true, Christian thanksgiving.

We are not, it is true, to omit our thanks for these *manifest* tokens of Divine favor. For our abundant harvests, for our unexampled prosperity amid the distractions of civil war, for our family blessings, for the goodness vouchsafed to our churches, for the spread of the gospel, for life, and health, and reason, for the ten thousand mercies which have concerned the various private interests of each family and of each individual,—for all these let the nation to-day send its triumphal Psalm up to the blue arches of Heaven, with full chorus of happy voices, and with the thunder of pealing organs—"Oh! praise the Lord all ye nations: praise him all ye people! for His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endureth forever."

But after all, it is *as a nation* that we assemble to-day to praise that God by whom "kings reign

and princes decree justice." Our thanksgiving is *officially* called forth by *national blessings*. Themes contemplating more than mere individual interests may, therefore, appropriately occupy our minds, especially since it is to the nation, its weal or woe, its destiny, its management, that all our eyes turn to-day with the most absorbing interest.

It is in view of these facts and principles that I call your attention this morning to the subject of *national discipline* : not to offend prejudice, not to excite partisanship, not for the sake of idle declamation, but that, as Christians, praying for the coming of Christ's Kingdom, and recognizing a Christian nationality as the end of all governmental experiments, we may be led to view the events of the hour in their true relations to the duty of thankfulness. And if our thoughts shall be occupied with the evolution of God's great plans, if we have been watching the sweep of the stream rather than the shape of the chips and fragments it carries with it, if we can stop at this point, and look back over a year, and see that the grand design has advanced a single inch toward its accomplishment,—that the east is more deeply tinged with the coming sun of a glorious fulfilment, then our thanksgiving will be worthy a Christian nation, and our courage for the future immeasurably strengthened.

National Discipline, as I understand the term, embraces a direct and continuous supervision of God over the events of a nation's history, the shaping these events to a well defined and beneficent Divine purpose, and the training of men by his own appointed means for the accomplishment of that purpose

It is not necessary to argue the fact of a general Divine supervision in national History. I have no discussion with that class of philosophers who deny it, or who evade a flat denial by the astounding paradox that the individual is controlled by Providence and society by law. We may leave them to reconcile for themselves the denial of Providential intervention, with the assumption of universal law, which is the highest human expression of providential working. But the second proposition involves a truth of great and universal interest. National Discipline, we have said, includes the shaping of the events of National history to subserve a divine purpose; and an examination of History will, I think, reveal a common law underlying all these developments, viz: that each distinct form of nationality is guided in its growth so as to make it, sooner or later, the exponent of a great political, social, or moral idea. The various streams which go to make up the sum total of each distinct nationality,

empty into the same great basin. All national life is *illustrative*. With nations as with men, "no one liveth unto himself." In God's plan, nations exist with reference to principles: they are not merely positive, absolute developments of culture, or war, or political constitutions. When the page of a nation's history is complete, God writes at the head of it a grand, comprehensive truth as the condensed result of its social and political struggles, — its aggressions, its conquests, its defeats, the forces that have influenced it, — and holds the text and sermon up to the inspection of the world.

For illustrations of this truth (and its importance justifies us in pausing to illustrate it,) we must go to the past rather than to the present. There we find both the processes and the results of national development crystallized, — fixed for our inspection. Regarding the field of history from a point so distant, we lose in accuracy of detail perhaps, but we gain in facility of generalizing. We take in at a glance that which principally concerns us, the movement of masses. We discover great currents if we do not see eddies.

Let us consider briefly, both as most familiar and as most apposite, the three nationalities of Rome, Greece, and Judæa — and nothing can be clearer

than the manifestation in each of these of a distinct idea to which its national growth tended.

The whole development of Rome culminated in the idea of *organized power*: Her very name was *strength*; and as an exponent of this idea she takes her place in the Divine scheme, and in the system of the philosophic historian. Through all her aggressions and conquests and cruelties, we see this appearing as her representative thought. Wherever she went, she stamped it. Her legions never encamped for a night without building a fort according to the best known principles of the art, with its walls and gates and streets, constructed with mathematical precision. Her armies revealed the perfection of physical discipline. Social, domestic, individual life were merged in the life of the state. In the departments of law and forensic oratory alone can she lay claim to originality. The results of finer culture,—her Drama, her Poetry, her Philosophy, were but feeble reproductions of the works of her Greek neighbor. Her language was rich in the terms of jurisprudence, and her pandects have entered into all later legislation. Her uniform policy with respect to a conquered territory or province, was to merge it in the sphere of her grand and compact organization, and by roads and highways and every *physical* appliance, to bind it to the great centre. She left this phys-

ical stamp, this mark of a strong external force, everywhere; in improved administration, in severe discipline, in magnificent roads and forts and bridges and aqueducts. Her moral and intellectual impress was faint, as might have been expected from a nation which was content to give the world a second hand literature, and which yielded itself a ready prey to the luxurious corruptions of the East.

In Greece we discover an entirely different, indeed an opposite development; — that of *intellectual strength* and *æsthetic culture*. Her people were less order-loving and law-abiding than their brothers across the Ionian, prone to try new experiments in government as well as in science, as adventurous in politics as in maritime enterprise. The Greek mind was clear, subtle, logical, less reflective but more active than the Oriental, the perceptions quick, the æsthetic susceptibilities exquisitely fine, the imagination vivid, the temperament enthusiastic; and the whole breathed itself into a language which united the perfections of grace and strength, full of natural melody, capable of the subtlest shades of expression, alike flexible in the mazes of philosophic discussion, majestic in the “thunderous lilt” of the Epic, and tender, sparkling and full of passion, in the lighter measures of lyric song. The restless and enter-

prising disposition of the people awakened the spirit of colonization. They lined the shores of Asia with their towns, and had entrenched themselves on the Italian peninsula ere the seven-hilled city had reached the zenith of its power. But where Rome crushed, Greece impressed.—Where Rome left only the marks of her strong and bloody gripe, Greece pervaded the intellect, and moulded the morals, and refined the tastes; darting the vivid rays of her thought into the golden mists of Asiatic speculation, and mellowing even the rude outlines of old Roman asceticism beneath her subtle charm.

In Judea, again, we find a third nationality, differing radically from both the others, yet equally marked by one leading characteristic. Rome bore on her front the iron crown of power. Greece wore the chaplet of Intellect and Taste. Judea's brow was glorified by the halo of *Religion*. Without the aggressive power, splendid organization and tenacious grasp of the first, without the artistic taste and literary culture of the second, she was a type of that which was to the others only a variable incident. Her whole national life and polity were religious. Her national and religious politics touched each other at every point. The fundamental idea of her nationality was a Divine call and a Divine segregation. Her leaders and

rulers were priests. The very watchmen on the temple walls, as they relieved each other's guard, broke the stillness of the night with psalms of praise to Jehovah. Her language, harsh and barren as the rocks of her own Sinai, unfit for philosophic discussion or for the manifold uses of general literature, conveyed the grand religious dogmas which lie at the basis of all religious belief and discussion, and their kindred themes, with a sublime simplicity and a glowing fervor which Homer and Sophocles never equalled. Alike with the Greek, the Jew developed the spirit of enterprise which carried him eventually to every quarter of the known world, and, even before Christ, caused the worship of Abraham's God to ascend, alike from the borders of the Caspian, from the interior of Syria, and from the banks of the Nile. The national character and the national punishment which scattered the Jewish tribes, thus co-operated in diffusing the great idea of the worship of one, only, living and true God, so that the fulness of time should find a soil ready prepared for the gospel of peace.

In thus briefly reviewing the characteristics of these three nationalities, we have said enough to prove that the ends of their national development were distinct; and a moment's consideration of their relations to a single event, will show a defi-

nite Divine purpose in this fact. Each of these nations had a special purpose to subserve in bringing about the fulness of time. We can only sum it up briefly. The giant grasp and organizing power of Rome gathered, and held in a temporary political unity, the various distinct nationalities that were to be pervaded with the spirit of the gospel; and, by the roads which she built to bind these to the centre, paved a highway for its messengers. As Rome furnished the material basis for the diffusion of the gospel, Greece provided an intellectual medium. She had not only carried her high culture and mental discipline into other lands, and brought them into contact alike with the Jew, the Roman, and the Asiatic, but in the city of the Ptolemies—Alexandria, where the peculiarities of Greek, Jewish, Roman, and Oriental life came into intimate contact, a theological language was formed, rich in all the phrases of the schools; preeminently capable of that vivid word-painting demanded by the illustrative character of the gospel, and adequate to the subtlest distinctions and the nicest and most precise statement; thus giving the new faith a weapon for controversy as well as for evangelization. These, with the religious foundation laid by the spread of Judaism, the diffusion of those ideas which underlay no less its own system than the gospel, form a threefold

vindication of the wisdom of that God who sees from afar the fulfilment of promise, who makes even the wrath of man to praise him, causing the heathen to pave the roads along which rides He who hath on his vesture a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, followed by the armies which are in Heaven.

Other instances might easily be adduced : these, which are more familiar, are sufficient to illustrate my position, that, in every national development, God has a distinct purpose to subserve, and designs to make it illustrative of a great idea. But here it may be said by one who begins to anticipate my line of thought, that we are in no position to apply such a test to our own nation ; that we cannot determine what particular idea God has selected us to illustrate, because we are not far enough from the events, and cannot therefore generalize accurately. To some extent this may be true. We cannot of course speak with the inspiration of prophets, nor can we come to a conclusion as certain as in the cases already cited, where the processes and the results of national growth are fixed, defined, and open to our study. Nevertheless we can draw much more than a speculative inference. We have the advantage of being able to start with this recognized principle, and to refer to it each successive fact as it reveals itself.

The nations whose rise and decay have furnished us this key to the locks of history, not only did not discern the direction of events, but never thought of looking for a general direction, save perhaps with reference to some temporary end. We, I repeat, begin our investigations with the thought of GOD IN HISTORY; and mysterious as are the Divine workings at times,—though His ways and thoughts are not as ours, yet for the reverent and careful eye of Christian study, he traces the outlines of His grand purposes so plainly as to leave little possibility of error. And moreover we *are*, though comparatively in our national infancy, far enough from a vast crowd of events, to enable us to generalize and to draw a reasonable conclusion. Not only has the cloud lifted from our early national struggles sufficiently for us to survey the field, but the events in the history of other nations, converging, for years previous, to the development of this new nationality, point with a directness and persistence which we cannot misunderstand.

Whether, therefore, our nation is finally to exhibit in a concentrated form the best results of all former civilizations, and to be time's last, best gift to the world, or whether we are merely an incident in the grand march of human progress, or whether we are merely to illustrate some single idea which in its turn is to subserve some great

purpose far beyond our ken—this fact will scarcely admit of contradiction, that our national development has centred round the two great ideas of LIBERTY and RELIGION.

But I have no desire to direct your thoughts to the ideas of liberty which have become the staple of popular thought and popular oratory, ideas which are no more common than they are superficial and fallacious. We advance a very short distance toward the interpretation of the Divine dealings with us, when we talk of the “refuge for the oppressed of every clime,” which is in itself a glaring falsehood: when we sing of the “Land of the free and the home of the brave,” or when we laud the glories of that fearfully perverted term, *Democracy*. The important fact which claims our attention is the *joint development* of these two ideas, Liberty and Religion. This, I assert, is the end toward which the leadings of Providence in our history have tended. This is the thought which God, by his own methods of discipline, is aiming to impress on this nation.

I draw this inference in the first place from the foundations of our history. Run your eye for a moment over the leading nationalities of the world, and you find these principles, not always in unison, gradually taking shape among the other developments of their history, eventually, perhaps,

becoming controlling forces in their civilization, one or both of them worked out from the tumult of war, and discussion, and revolution. In England, both these ideas were *results* before they became moving forces. They grew up with English civilization, but did not for years form the distinctly recognized basis of its nationality. Its first ages were marked by the struggles of tribes and races for supremacy. Principles were not involved in their conflicts. Rome, with her armed legions and majestic galleys, led by the first warrior of the world, breaks in upon the quiet barbarism of Britain, lying passive and trembling beneath the gripe of Druidical superstition. Saxons, Danes, Normans, overrun it in turn, each leaving their impress, in excess of liberty, or in the spirit of foreign aggression, or in the weakness and civil distractions of feudalism. The struggles of tribes and races gradually gives place to the conflict of classes,—king, barons, commons, clergy, each arrayed against the other; yet in their very disputes setting in motion the discussion of social and religious questions, and thus superseding by these “the blind and passionate animosity which had once separated the Norman and Saxon races,” until in the reign of the third Edward, the influence of the commons in the constitution, now first assuming an appreciable weight, announced the growth

of popular liberty, and the preaching of Wickliffe began the history of English Puritanism. In France, Liberty aimed to assert itself independently of Religion, and in some instances indeed, to ignore religion. Italy and Holland struggled for freedom in opposition to religion, because religion and tyranny were in their cases identical.

But in America we first see the numerous and varied experiences of the old world bearing new fruit in the foundation of a nationality on these two, *jointly recognized* principles. Hand in hand these sisters started from Delft Haven to fulfil the grandest dream of the Christian Philanthropist, to accomplish together the work which neither had ever completed separately; and in the pent up cabin of that little vessel, on the rocking Atlantic, they cemented their covenant to the chant of the fetterless sea and untamed winds, fit choristers to sing the anthem of liberty. The interest which follows the Mayflower along her stormy track dwells not chiefly in those superficial thoughts to which schoolboy declamation directs us,—the phases of personal sorrow, the severance of national and family ties, the hardships of the journey, the heroism of feeble women, the martyr spirit which preferred hardship and exile to home and mental bondage. All interests and individuals and incidents are merged in that scene in the Mayflower's cabin,

when the pilgrims, in the name of God, united themselves by solemn compact “into a body politic *for the glory of God, and for the advancement of the Christian faith.*” “This,” as the historian well remarks, “was the birth of popular constitutional liberty. The middle age had been familiar with charters and constitutions; but they had been merely compacts for immunities, partial enfranchisements, patents of nobility, concessions of municipal privileges, or limitations of the sovereign power in favor of feudal institutions. In the cabin of the Mayflower humanity recovered its rights, and instituted government on the basis of equal laws for the general good.”* Could the future have been unveiled to the tyrants of the old world, could they have read as God read it, and as we read it to-day, the significance of that little bark buffeting the waves, could they have known the freight which she carried, a mighty thought whose fruitage should turn to ashes in the mouths of despots, how quickly would they have sped on her track their swiftest-winged ships; how would clouds of incense have arisen, and prayers have poured from the lips of cowed priests in all their stately cathedrals, that the winds might be made messengers of their wrath, and the waves bury forever the germ of freedom. But no such fate was

* Bancroft, Vol. I.

in store for her. Safe as the ark which bore above the wrecks of thrones and principalities the only remnant of an old race, and the only germ of the new, she swept the main. The child that trod her slippery decks, and clung to its mother's arm as it gazed in terror on the tumbling billows, might have dismissed its fear; for a mightier than she who in fable led the Trojan to the seat of Roman Empire, even He who walked the stormy crests of Galilee, marked out the track of that ark of Liberty, and whispered to that devoted band "it is I, be not afraid."

Time will not, of course, allow us to follow out in detail all the evidences pointing to this great fact. The whole course of American History from Plymouth rock tends to this inference. The idea of civil liberty was the central thought of all our national convulsions from that time onward, our representative thought in the eyes of other lands, the ever recurring source of their antagonism. The earthquakes which shook the infant state were ever throwing this granite substratum to the surface. It cropped out in the resistance to taxation, in the spirit which tore from its pedestal the statue of England's sovereign, in the burning wrath which strewn the road from Lexington to Concord with British dead, in the steady valor that sent British columns

torn and bleeding down the slopes of Charlestown, in the sturdy endurance which consecrated Valley Forge, and in the intelligent patriotism which cast off allegiance to human monarchies, and propounded to the world the charter of human equality.— It proved itself in 1812 the same as in '76, and thank God, it bids fair still to vindicate itself against the fearful odds of civil rebellion, foreign menace, and secret treason.

Side by side with this idea of civil liberty, wrought the idea of religion. It would be easy to point out the peculiar adaptation of American nationality to the spread of religious truth. Facts point strongly to America, as the banner-bearer of the nations in the work of Evangelization. The freedom of discussion, and the dissociation of Church and State, acting to exhibit religious truth in all its phases, to render conviction deep, and faith intelligent; the elasticity of society, the comparative ease with which classes fuse, the absence of those strongly marked social distinctions which characterize the old world, tending to bring men of all orders and creeds and characters into contact; the admixture of foreign elements with our society, the attraction exerted not only upon the laboring poor, but upon much of the intelligence of Europe; the commercial enterprise which, in preparing highways for trade, opens

highways for the gospel, the marked individuality of the American character, demanding a field for independent development, and finding it in the vast, unsettled territory into which the pioneer pushes in advance of civilization, the vast system of public education, the language, rich in religious literature, and a vehicle at once strong and ample for the conveyance of religious truth, the natural assimilation of Christianity to free institutions, all these facts and others which might be named, point to religion as standing side by side with Liberty at the centre of our national development.

The point, however, with which we are especially concerned, is the *joint action* of these two ideas; the legitimate effect of which would have been an approach, at least, to harmony between the principles of civil administration and of true religion. Nor is it necessary to follow them through every stage of our history, or to trace the progress of their divergence. It is enough for us to know, with sorrow, that they have diverged, and widely. If the highest exhibition of the union of these two forces be the end of our national existence, then truly we have run boldly in the face of our destiny. Here we must drop theorizing, here we must leave historical parallels, and come down to the plain palpable facts of our

own generation. For years past, civil administration, the expression of our national liberty, has been conducted in defiance of religion, and in opposition to its fundamental principles. Policy and party, not principle, have been the controlling forces in government. We have ignored the fact that, whoever be President, *God is King*. And Liberty, thus divorced from her natural ally which alone could show her the relations of obedience to freedom, which alone could harmonize the individualities she tended to develop, which alone could teach men to be rulers by teaching them to be submissive, exhibit the true majesty of the law, and purify the people from whom the law proceeds,—Liberty, I say, thus divorced, has run into wild and brutal license, which has brought us well nigh to the brink of anarchy. But what a spectacle have we presented before the world! Oh! if the King of kings were to summon this nation before his bar this morning, and demand the usury of those two precious coins, bearing his image and superscription, which He committed to our keeping on Plymouth Rock, truly we should stand speechless at the sight of our pitiable interest. It was time, I ween, that some force should be applied to breach the walls of our nationality to their foundation, to show the corruptions which had found a hiding place in its vaults, and what

fiendish malignity, and besotted ignorance were undermining it. The emergencies of history put representative men on trial. Men sit down at such times to scrutinize the causes underlying the emergency: and the acts of their leaders, which at the time were accepted without suspicion, in silence, or even with approbation, are brought under a searching examination which often makes the popular idol of yesterday the popular victim of to-day. When the Syracusans, on one occasion, desired to raise money for the prosecution of a war, they put up the statues of their heroes, and commanders, and legislators, at public sale; and sentence of auction was passed upon each of them by a majority of votes, as upon so many criminals in court. Thus, in the light of our present emergencies, stand the men whom we ourselves, by the voice of the majority, have for years past, and particularly of late, placed at the helm of State. What is the verdict upon them to-day, passed by the quickened conscience of the nation? How many will stand the test? Have the two great ideas of liberty and religion found expression in the lives and administration of our rulers? Has the moral worth of a man entered at all into the consideration of his fitness for office? How long is it since a leading politician declared publicly that if the Devil were nominated as the candidate

of his party, he would support him ? Is it not a notorious fact that, on three separate occasions, the Empire City of this union placed in its mayoral chair a man whom the law had branded as a thief and swindler ? What crown shall we place on the brows of him who rewarded the confidence of the people which had honored him with its choicest gift, by administering the government in the interest of the southern aristocracy, and by comforting the arch traitor of Richmond with words like these :

“ WITHOUT DISCUSSING THE QUESTION OF RIGHT, *of abstract power*, TO SECEDE, *I have never believed that actual disruption of the Union can occur without blood ; and if, through the madness of Northern Abolitionists, that dire calamity must come, the fighting will not be along Mason and Dixon's line merely.* IT WILL BE WITHIN OUR OWN BORDERS, IN OUR OWN STREETS, BETWEEN THE TWO CLASSES OF CITIZENS TO WHOM I HAVE REFERRED. THOSE WHO DEFY LAW AND SCOUT CONSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATIONS, WILL, IF WE EVER REACH THE ARBITRAMENT OF ARMS, FIND OCCUPATION ENOUGH AT HOME.”

Yours truly,

FRANKLIN PIERCE.

Where shall we find a niche in the temple of infamy high enough to place the man who could sit in the Executive Chair, and hear the purpose of rebellion, and the menaces against national

strongholds, and the threats of usurpation openly bruited about ; who knew that a government fortress was threatened with siege, yet would not lift a finger to relieve that beleaguered garrison, or to turn aside a cannon from its line of death ! Have those days passed from your recollection when, because the law insisted on vindicating itself, and enforcing its enactments, murder and plunder and arson ran rampant in the streets of our chief cities, and the Governor of this state, to whom had been confided the protection of our homes, our wives and little ones, met the incarnate demons with their hands red with the blood of those murdered negroes, and with bland smile and courtly gesture addressed them as “ *my friends !* ” How long is it since a man on whom poured a blaze of the most damning evidence to prove him a traitor of blackest dye, a friend of rebellion, a bitter opponent of government in its efforts to suppress it, so mean a traitor that the very friends in whose interest he labored knew not what to do with him, was nominated for governor of one of the greatest States of the north ; and his sympathizing friends held a meeting of condolence for his arrest for treason in front of the Court House yonder ? Nor has it been *safe* to introduce questions of morals into politics. Dismission and loss of caste have followed the ministers that dared

exhibit the relations of the gospel to political questions. Hooting mobs have assaulted men who dared to condemn an established national institution, a system which touches the fundamental principles of the gospel, a system of indiscriminate lust, and oppression, and cruelty, and murder of soul and body—as a crime and a disgrace. A southern ruffian has stricken down in his seat the man that called the nation to account for her sin, and has received for the cowardly act the ovations and plaudits of his constituents. The lobbies and galleries at Albany last winter, were packed with the very scum of our cities, armed with pistol and knife to silence the men who dared advocate reform and denounce corruption. We sicken at the recital. Are these the appropriate exhibitions of a Christian nation? Has religious sentiment pervaded our communities no more deeply than this? Does Religion teach patriotism? Does it teach humanity? Does it teach public faith and honor and honesty? Does it teach hatred to treason, and zeal for the majesty of the law? Then, alas! with all our stately churches, and thronging congregations, and eloquent priests, religion has but partially done its work—the nation has turned from God and followed idols.

To bring these two ideas, religion and freedom, again into harmonious and united action, is the problem of our National Discipline. And here let me call attention to one important fact, that our great national convulsion grows out of a question, which perhaps above every other, brings these ideas jointly into its solution; they must work together or fail. While I have no apology to make for introducing the subject of human slavery, I have no desire to enter into a tirade against its horrors, or to discuss it at all, farther than to bring out this thought. It is a fact which lies directly in the track of our discussion, and which must be dealt with, in order to establish the principles with which we set out. Nor indeed will it be necessary to dwell here at length. The relations of this fact to the question of liberty are obvious. Its relations to Christianity quite as obvious, one would think, though so persistently ignored by a large class. And all the political schemes which the freest government in the world ever devised, are powerless to touch the evil without the cooperation of moral force and Christian sentiment. Political philosophy in this encounter, is like Hercules in the battle with the Hydra. It may cut off the monster's heads, but it needs its ally, Religion, to sear the necks, and prevent two springing up in the place of one. We cannot

escape its moral aspect. Men who attempt its discussion from the standpoints of ethnology or political economy, come round inevitably into the realm of morals and religion. It is in an awakened moral perception that it intuitively recognizes its deadliest foe; and it is for this cause that it tries to wrest this weapon to its own use, and, by the most tortuous logic, the most ingenious pleading, and an affectation of the most expansive benevolence, seeks to pervert the gospel itself to a defence of its atrocities, and to hold up slavery as the great Missionary institution of the age. Not only so, but the institution appeals to motives which only a moral force can affect. It is the keystone of a great social arch, and cannot be removed without a displacement of all the other stones. It appeals to human pride and selfishness, and to the natural love of ease and indolence it has tended to foster. Human lust and human cupidity are alike interested in its maintenance. It comes into direct contact with those fundamental questions which are moral and not mental, which are not matters of opinion, but absolute facts, written by God on the great heart of humanity, on which no man is privileged to have other than one opinion;—the rights to person, to family, to life, to honestly acquired property, to choice of labor, to mental cultivation. It reaches lower still, if

possible, and the question it touches is still one of morals and religion ; the question whether, in the light of the gospel precepts, or even in the light of nature, man has a right to enslave the *spirit and the mind* as well as the body, and so to dwarf and cripple and blind them as to make them hug their chains, or at least be content in their bondage. Slavery is not the normal condition of men, and it is not natural for them to be either content or happy in Slavery ; and the argument so unblushingly advanced by its advocates, that the negro is happier and better in slavery than in freedom, comes back with fearful force upon its advocates, asking them who are responsible for this contentment with the life and treatment of brutes, and what must have been the measure of the oppression which has crushed out higher aspirations, and weakened the attachment to even the natural rights of men ? Which, while God's immutable law proclaims progress as the rule of humanity, limits its application, and condemns a race to stagnation as the means of filling its pockets and glutting its beastly appetites. We have tried the experiment of dealing with this question on purely political grounds, to our heart's content. We tried it by concessions, and compromises, and fugitive slave bills ; by allowing slaveholders to appoint our magistrates, and to dictate terms in our coun-

cils, to dispose of our ships and to unman our arsenals: and at each new political compromise we smilingly said "all is well," until the guns of Sumter told us we must meet the issue fairly and on other and broader grounds.

It now remains for us to look at some of the results of our present sore chastisement, and to see whether they furnish us just ground for thanksgiving.

On the fact that the questions of the hour have, to a great extent, been raised above mere party issues, it will not be necessary to dwell at length. We see it and rejoice over it. The great states of the Union have proclaimed their repentance in a thunder peal that has sent dismay to the hearts of tyrants and schemers, and the word which laid the axe at the root of slavery's accursed upas, has long ago sounded in the ears of the world. It may be said, indeed, that such a development as the last named, proves nothing as to the advance of moral sentiment; that it was a measure rendered necessary by military demands, and that its application was not universal. I answer, I am by no means claiming complete moral regeneration as a result of this discipline. It is enough for our purpose, knowing as we do that God works slowly, to be able to discern tendencies toward regeneration. If the President was

compelled to wait for a military necessity before he could issue the proclamation of freedom, I, for one, believe that he rejoiced at the necessity. But whether this were so or not, one thing is palpable; that the people were abreast with the government on the expediency and propriety of this measure when it was issued, and now are far in advance of the popular sentiment of that hour: and to-day the great voice of the Nation sends back its loud AMEN! to the charter of the African's liberty. In studying the history of nations, as indeed in studying the acts of individuals, we cannot always pretend to read motives; but when a good deed is done in the face of persistent opposition, when the sentiment of the people applauds it, when that sentiment grows daily deeper and deeper, and sees more and more reason to cherish the act, it is fair to assume that there is a healthful growth of moral sentiment somewhere. If God has awakened men to a sense of their error by the chastisement of war and pecuniary loss, we have nothing to do with that. It corresponds with his action in other cases. The result is there, the word is spoken, the people not only acquiesce but rejoice, not only rejoice but act, and level party distinctions which seemed immovable, and tear up prejudices which appeared ineradicable, and stand on the broad platform of freedom for all men.

And that men are heard and applauded who have in time past been hissed and stoned, and who argue this question on purely moral grounds, as they ever have done; that sentiments once openly expressed and approved are now frowned upon, that public opinion has forced men and organizations which betrayed their great and holy trust of educating public opinion by refusing to lift up their voice on this subject—to fall into line under the banner of freedom, if these things indicate no clearer moral sense, if these things point only to a clearer apprehension of political policy, then history is no true criterion of moral progress.

To the end of radical reformation, radical disclosure of the evil was necessary. None could teach us this lesson like God, and fearfully has he taught it. For one, if there were no other cause of gratitude for this national upheaving, I should thank God profoundly for this. We knew there was party corruption before, but we did not know how deep it was, we did not know how thoroughly it had permeated every department of our administration and of our society, until we saw Presidents conniving at treason, and found the doors of the public treasury open and the guardian vanished with the contents. We knew that party spirit had run high, but we needed this war to teach us how many men would abandon their

country's dearest interests, and tie her hands in the hour of her need, for the sake of party. We knew there was sectional disaffection before; we knew that there might be danger from the disaffected element; but we did not know how deep was the disaffection or how imminent the danger, until the sound of rebel cannon disclosed to us a carefully matured and long contemplated scheme of public treason, bearing the mark of the beast upon its front; and until the flood of discussion thus evoked, opened our eyes to the nature and tendencies of the system we had been petting and courting to keep it quiet. We knew there was individual wickedness and selfishness among us: but the war showed us, if we did not know it before, that men, while these tremendous issues of national safety, honor, existence, were hanging in the balance, could yet take advantage of the nation's distress to fill their own pockets, and could enrich themselves at the expense of the very food and clothing of the country's defenders. We knew there was moral weakness and moral cowardice which loved peace better than right, and prosperity better than national honor; but we knew it better, to our sorrow, when we heard men advocate continued concession and cowardly compromise in the face of armed aggression. We knew that the material interests supported by

Southern patronage had tended to blind men to the evil of Slavery ; but we did not know how deeply it had corrupted even the free North, until we heard men plead for its interests and rights, and advocate new guarantees of its stability after it had clearly revealed itself as the root of all our troubles. We imagined perhaps that we were true patriots. We adored the idea of national destiny. God brought the question home to us on the two naked ideas of our national development, freedom and religion, and said to us, let us see how deep and sincere is your devotion ; and too many found out then the terrible mistake that they had erected an altar to an unknown God ; that they were worshipping a mere abstraction ; that theirs was a child's patriotism, finding its fitting expression in bonfires and banners and cannon ; and not the deep sentiment that apprehended the issues at stake, and was willing to meet and fight them out like men, at any hazard, and on the broad ground of right. If the knowledge of the disease be half the cure, thanks be to God for the discipline that has shown us the disease.

Another important and palpable result of this National discipline, has been the general acquaintance it has necessitated with the fundamental issues at stake, the confirmation of unsettled opinions, and the formation of clearly defined opinions where none had previously existed.

The movement at the South was controlled by a few men, and these the capitalists and politicians, a class comprising nearly all the education, intelligence, and influence of their country. These men understood this question from its foundations. They saw it in all its relations. The great questions of climate, soil, race, the economical questions underlying their peculiar institution, its tendencies, its necessities, they fully comprehended. They knew that extension was a necessity of their existence; that power was necessary to extension; that monied aristocracy was necessary to power, and that Slavery was necessary to monied aristocracy. On their great movement they staked everything. They knew that failure meant extinction. The poor whites, the ignorant masses, who made up so large a portion of their armies, were not acquainted with these profound questions. The aristocratic element of southern society was able to influence them with a few eloquent and ingenious falsehoods, and to force them, if need were, into co-operation. Their power was centralized, their discipline inhumanly severe, their control perfect, and they entered upon the conflict after years of preparation. The moving power of the North, on the other hand, was diffused throughout the masses. Absorbed in its material progress, it had given less

time to the study of social problems, and hence did not, like the South, at once see how deep-seated were the issues of the conflict. The movement of the North, was the movement of the *people*; that of the South, the movement of a compact body of leaders. At the North, the principles involved had not only to be diffused over a large area, but absorbed, before the movement assumed a vastness and force adequate to the occasion. The great proportion of the men who fought her battles and furnished her resources, were not machines, but thinkers; and both would know why they fought and why they spent; and so the outbreak of the rebellion found the South like a lithe and sinewy athlete, with an eye that had counted the cost, and measured its adversary, with every limb trained, and a determination to conquer or die. It found the North like a giant half asleep, or bent on other business, lazily confident in his strength, rejoicing in his prosperity, eating, drinking, and making merry, and so little conscious of the power, and will, and dire hate of his enemy, as to think he could crush him with one hand, while he carried his cup to his lips with the other. This fact is enough of itself to account for the apathy with which we entered upon the contest. The first blow struck by the South was charged with the concentrated malice

and venom of half a century ; was struck deliberately and followed up vigorously. Our first return blow was the passionate, ill-aimed stroke of a man suddenly assaulted, and startled into self defence. And this fact, too, points to the deeper purpose of Providence, in the strange succession of defeats and disasters which so startled us from our self-security and conceit. The delay was needed for this process of absorption. God meant to put a moral power behind this movement, a deep, intelligent conviction of its import, which should propel it with the resistless sweep of an Alpine avalanche, gathering momentum at every bound, and should carry it on to the complete extinction of slave tyranny. Delay was needed to produce conviction. The North would not move without conviction, and it came slowly. Slowly the true issues of the contest sank into the Northern mind ; slowly the depth of Southern hate, and the intensity of Southern purpose, and the radicalness of Southern treason, and the horrible nature of Southern designs, dawned upon the Northern mind. Each defeat, each vessel burned by Anglo Rebel pirates, each Union man murdered or imprisoned for his principles, was a spark gathering itself into the bosom of a cloud of wrath, which is already gathering blackness, and settling portentously down on the mountains of the South, soon

to discharge its volleyed lightnings upon the hordes of treason. May God send its blasting, riving fires into the very heart of Rebellion; and if defeat and delay have brought our soldiers to fight, and our capitalists to pay, and parents, and husbands, and wives to sacrifice their dearest interests from a patriotism which is a principle, the outgrowth of understanding conviction, then thank God for defeat and delay.

But farther, this discipline has brought men to the distinct assertion of their political principles, and to examine whether they had any principles or not. The great thought of the age has gone through the land as with a lighted torch, peering into every corner; and it has been in vain for men to call for rocks and mountains to cover them. Men who regarded a political opinion as a piece of family plate, bequeathed from their fathers, and to be hoarded and cherished untouched, have been compelled reluctantly to open the sanctuary, and brush away the cobwebs, and see how the opinion met the requirements and stood the test of new issues. A voice has gone up and down crying "*choose ye THIS DAY whom ye will serve.*" The tests of the hour have put doubtful, halting men—men who shifted with the popular tide, and bowed low to God one day, and equally low to the Devil the next,—who were, in the worst possible sense, 'all

things to all men,' into a position where they must commit themselves to one set of principles or to the other. Hitherto, they could run back into a forest of party lines, and casuistical distinctions, and half defined principles, and by skilful evasion and compromise, manage to preserve a respectable character for consistency. A more dangerous class, in church or state, does not exist; and I am thankful that the fiery discipline of the present has consumed their refuge of lies, and has brought the issues of the day down to an alternative from which there is no escape—*loyalty or disloyalty*.

Nor have we been wanting in that class of men who have no settled political opinions, and who do not care to have any. They want only to be "let alone." They are not interested in politics; they dislike their adjuncts. They know little or nothing of party issues or of national questions; or, if their opinions are ever so strong, and their acquaintance with the progress of affairs ever so intimate, they are absorbed in business or books, and are quite willing that any party shall rule that will not interfere with their interests. That the number of these has been large, may be partially inferred from the character of the hands into which political machinery has passed. For men of this class to say that

politics have fallen into such hands that they are disgusted, is not a fair statement of the case. There are more intelligent, and able, and virtuous men in the country than there ever were; and it is because such men have suffered themselves to grow lukewarm; have refused to accept of public office because of its dreary routine; have refused to work in the political arena, because they had to work in disagreeable company;—because of these things, our public offices reek with corruption, and mobocrats and villains administer our laws. There is less excuse for the existence of this class among us than elsewhere. Here no man is excusable for keeping out of the sphere of politics, for every man is a governor. The government and its administration are each man's *personal business*, and he has no right to let *anything* so absorb him as to leave him no time to devote to his country. Her institutions are to be his study, her government his care, her interests his own. God has taught this class of men a lesson—a lesson which it is to be hoped they will remember. This war, touching as it has every material interest of the country, has compelled more men to study national issues, to form opinions on national questions, and to interest themselves personally in national movements, than any force that has ever operated in our history.

They have awaked to find, not only their public institutions, but their homes, their personal safety menaced. They have awaked to the fact that, while they have been occupied with their money-bags and their safes, giving splendid entertainments, or meditating in costly libraries, a power has been growing, to whose suppression their wealth and influence should have been applied in its infancy, but which has grown to proportions which enable it to give fearful battle, and which even make its subjugation a doubtful question. For this infusion of mental stamina; for this clear definition of political issues and political parties, enabling us to see who are our friends and who are our enemies; for this discipline, that has not only sifted, but created opinion—we thank God.

These are some of the lessons of our National Discipline. Their number is by no means exhausted, and we must pause upon the very threshold. If this discipline shall have wrought to make us purer and better, to develop us into a self-reliant, dignified, national manhood, willing to learn of other nations, but careless of their opinion when our own rights and duty are concerned, not unduly exalted by success, nor unduly depressed by reverse, if it shall have tended to point out our national faults and their remedy, to fill our citizens with a new sense of responsibility,

to base patriotism on conviction and principle, to fit the nation to govern itself, if it shall have purged the land from the great blot that defaced it, if it shall have given us higher and clearer ideas of national morality, if it shall have given shape to our heretofore vague ideas of national destiny, and arranged them round the two great thoughts of Liberty and Religion, then thank God for the Discipline. Though the rod be applied severely, let us kiss the hand that smites. Though the cup be bitter, let us bless Him that puts it to our lips. These results, as I have already said, are not fully accomplished; but we discover tendencies toward them all in the developments of the present struggle, and if severer chastisement will bring them out more definitely, and make their influence felt more deeply, in God's name let the blow fall. We may expect farther chastisement, not only as a punishment, but as a developing force. The evils we combat, have been growing for eighty years, and are not going to disappear at our word. They will die hard, and it is well; for God is testing our worthiness to enjoy the boon of liberty, by asking how much we love it, how hard we are willing to fight for it, how much we are willing to sacrifice for it: and if we shall do this work like men, if we shall fall in with God's manifest design to purge our national

floor thoroughly, to tear up the evil by the roots, if we shall finally succeed in accomplishing our end, in burying slavery forever, and getting national corruption under our feet, a shout of praise will go up from this people such as will rend the very Heavens. It shall rise from the granite hills of New England, mingled with the click of her busy looms, and the hum of her spindles; the valleys and rolling pastures of New York, standing thick with corn, shall be vocal with the acclamations of her sons; it shall roll upward from the deep bosom of Pennsylvania, and echo through the galleries of her iron and coal caverns; and the West shall catch the song on the sparkling peaks of its grand rampart, and send it back with an echo that shall tremble in every prairie flower. Aye, and the South, fair land of the sun, so long cursed with bondage, and reaping to-day over all its desolated plains the fruit of its dire sin, shall not be voiceless. Her freed bondmen shall make the air pulsate with their uncouth psalm of triumph, grand as the song which swept from Miriam's timbrel over the waves of the Red Sea; and her own sons, awakened by their bitter experience to the character of the tyranny that has held *them*, no less than the African, in bondage, and has striven to mount to empire on their necks, shall unite their unskilled voices in the general

anthem, singing with ever bolder emphasis, until the palmetto groves, and the still lagoons, and the snowy fields of cotton, now no longer King, shall be stirred with the voice of thanksgiving. Aye ! methinks, when that day shall dawn, the nation's shout might almost penetrate farther. Methinks it might steal into the ears of those fallen heroes who sleep on hillsides far away, and by whose graves sorrowing hearts shall give thanks with sobs. Methinks it might reach them as they lie in their cold beds at Antietam, and Chancellorville, at Donelson and Vicksburgh, at Fredericksburgh, and Chattanooga, and Bull Run, and stir their silent dust with a throb of thanksgiving—of thanksgiving, not that peace has been restored ; not that husbands, and sons, and fathers shall go forth to battle no more ; not that trade is revived and commerce safe ; but that God has led the nation through the vale of tears, through the terrible baptism of blood and fire, to a nobler and purer national life.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 013 764 574 9